

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 02122 091441Z

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ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

SCA-01 OMB-01 /066 W

----- 054452

R 091410Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6237

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

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DEPT PLEASE PASS AMB KEATING

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, IS, EG

SUBJ: EGYPT RETURNS 39 ISRAELI BODIES: ISRAELI VERSION

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO ISRAELI VERSION OF EVENTS, GOI HAS RELEASED 92 PRISONERS IN EXCHANGE FOR RETURN OF 39 ISRAELI BODIES ON APRIL 4, AND ACCEDED TO OTHER EGYPTIAN DEMANDS AS WELL. ISRAELIS CONTEND THAT EGYPT WAS COMMITTED TO RETURN OF BODIES BY PREVIOUSLY UNDISCLOSED AGREEMENT AND REJECT NOTION THAT THIS IS HUMANITARIAN GESTURE BY SADAT. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO ISRAELI PRESS "SENIOR FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS", AT APRIL 8 PRESS CONFERENCE, REJECTED CONTENTION THAT SADAT WAS PERFORMING HUMANITARIAN GESTURE BY RETURN OF 39 ISRAELI SOLDIERS ON APRIL 4. MFA OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY SAID THAT JANUARY 1974 DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT INCLUDED "A CLEAR AND UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT" TO THIS EFFECT,
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 02122 091441Z

CONTAINED IN SECRETARY DOCUMENT THE TEXT OF WHICH HAS NOT

YET BEEN MADE PUBLIC. RATHER THAN ABIDING BY THIS AGREEMENT, HOWEVER, EGYPTIANS IN ISRAELI VIEW EXTRACTED CONCESSIONS FROM GOI IN RETURN FOR BODIES, INCLUDING RELEASE OF 92 CONVICTED "TERRORISTS AND SPIES" WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN CARRIED OUT WITHOUT PUBLICITY.

3. GOI-SPONSORED ISRAELI NEWS SERVICE HAS RELEASED FOLLOWING VERSION OF EVENTS LEADING TO RELEASE OF BODIES. IN FEBRUARY 1975, HALF YEAR AFTER HALTING ITS SEARCH OF SINAI FOR REMAINING ISRAELI BODIES, EGYPT ANNOUNCED THE POSSIBILITY OF RETURNING ADDITIONAL BODIES BUT INSISTED ON NUMBER OF CONDITIONS: RELEASE OF ADDITIONAL PRISONERS HELD BY ISRAELIS; RIGHT OF EGYPT TO SUPPLY FOOD TO SINAI BEDUIN; DISTRIBUTION OF EGYPTIAN CALENDARS TO BEDUIN; AND EGYPTIAN SUPPLY OF CLOTHING TO COPTIC PRIESTS IN SINAI.

4. WHEN ICRC, SERVING AS INTERMIDIARY, APPROACHED GOI, EGYPTIANS LEVIED ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS TO EFFECT THAT RED CRESCENT BE ALLOWED TO RESUME OPERATIONS FROM ITS EL-ARISH OFFICE AND THAT SERVICES PROVIDED BY EL-ARISH HOSPITAL BE EXPANDED. ISRAEL REPORTEDLY AGREED TO ALL EGYPTIAN DEMANDS, OFFERING TO RELEASE TWENTY ADDITIONAL PRISONERS WITH CAVEAT THAT IT WOULD NOT RELEASE TERRORISTS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEATHS.

5. ISRAELIS SAY THAT WITH ONSET OF FLOODS IN EL-ARISH AREA IN MID-FEBRUARY, EGYPTIANS ADDED STILL FURTHER CONDITIONS FOR RELEASE OF BODIES, I.E. THAT EGYPT BE ALLOWED TO PROVIDE FOOD TO FLOOD VICTIMS AND THAT DISTRIBUTION BE UNDER SUPERVISION OF RED CROSS AND IN PRESENCE OF RED CRESCENT OFFICIAL, WITH NO ISRAELI PARTICIPATION. ISRAEL ACCEPTED THESE CONDITIONS AS IT HAD THE OTHERS, AND FOOD CONVOY TO EL-ARISH WAS PLANNED FOR MARCH 24. ON MARCH 22, HOWEVER, EGYPTIANS REPORTEDLY ANNOUNCED POSTPONEMENT OF OPERATION AND NO NEW DATE WAS SET.

6. ISRAELI VERSION OF EVENTS CONCLUDES THAT ONLY AFTER ISRAELI ACCEPTANCE OF ALL CONDITIONS DID EGYPT DISCLOSE THROUGH SECRETARY DURING MARCH SHUTTLE THAT IT INTENDED TO RETURN BODIES OF 39 ISRAELI SOLDIERS.

7. IN COURSE OF APRIL 8 PRESS CONFERENCE, MFA OFFICIALS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 TEL AV 02122 091441Z

DISCLOSED THAT EIGHTEEN BODIES WERE STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR ALTHOUGH EGYPT HAD NOT ADMITTED HAVING THEM. IT WAS ALSO STATED THAT NO DATE HAD BEEN SET FOR THE RETURN BY ISRAEL OF THE FINAL TWENTY PRISONERS. REFERRING TO THOSE EGYPTIAN DEMANDS INVOLVING SINAI BEDUIN AND COPTIC PRIESTS, THE OFFICIALS CONTEND THAT THESE WERE "TRUMPED-UP DEMANDS WHOSE PURPOSE WAS TO GENERATE THE IMPRESSION OF AN EGYPTIAN PRESENCE IN THE AREA". END UNCLASSIFIED.

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COMMENT: APPROPRIATE TREATMENT OF THE DEAD IS HIGHLY SENSITIVE ISSUE TO ISRAELIS, ESPECIALLY IN THE CASE OF FALLEN SOLDIERS. DEFMIN PERES ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS HAS EXPRESSED BITTER RESENTMENT THAT EGYPTIANS SHOULD HAVE SEIZED ON KNOWN ISRAELI SENSITIVITY IN ORDER TO EXTRACT ESSENTIALLY POLITICAL CONCESSIONS AND THIS FEELING IS WIDELY SHARED BY ISRAELI PUBLIC. ONE END RESULT OF CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING RETURN OF BODIES, UNFORTUNATELY, WILL BE FURTHER EROSION OF ISRAELI CONFIDENCE IN SADAT'S SINCERITY IN ANY SUBSEQUENT NEGOTIATIONS. END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. VELIOTES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POW RETURN, CASUALTIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 09 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GarlanWA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TELAV02122
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750123-0880
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750465/aaaachum.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GarlanWA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 AUG 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <02 SEP 2003 by GarlanWA>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EGYPT RETURNS 39 ISRAELI BODIES: ISRAELI VERSION BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED
TAGS: PFOR, MARR, IS, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006